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Guyana: An Overview

Located on the northern coast of South America between Suriname and Venezuela, English-speaking Guyana has characteristics similar to other Caribbean nations because of a common British colonial heritage (Guyana became independent in 1966). The country participates in Caribbean regional organizations, and its capital, Georgetown, serves as headquarters for the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), a regional integration organization. Once one of the poorest countries in the hemisphere, Guyana's development prospects have shifted since the discovery of large offshore oil deposits in 2015. U.S. and congressional interests in Guyana include trade relations and security cooperation.

Guyana at a Glance

Population: 799,000 (2024 est., IMF)

Ethnic Groups: Indo-Guyanese, or those of East Indian heritage, almost 40%; Afro-Guyanese, almost 30%; mixed, 20%; Amerindian, almost 11% (2012 est., CIA)

Area: 83,000 square miles, about the size of Idaho

GDP: \$24.5 billion (2024, est., current prices, IMF)

Real GDP Growth: 62.3% (2022), 33.0% (2023), 43.8% (2024), 14.4% (2025, est.) (constant prices, IMF)

Per Capita GDP: \$28,920 (2024 est., current prices, IMF)

Sources: International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *World Factbook*.

Political and Economic Environment

Guyana has a hybrid republican/parliamentary form of government, with a 65-member unicameral National Assembly. The presidential candidate of the party or coalition receiving the most votes becomes president, and the president appoints the prime minister and cabinet.

Current President Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) won the country's March 2020 elections, defeating incumbent President David Granger, who led a coalition consisting of A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) and the Alliance for Change (AFC). In the National Assembly, Ali's PPP/C took a majority of 33 seats, the APNU/AFC coalition won 31 seats, and a smaller party won the remaining seat. Marred by allegations of fraud, final elections results were delayed until August 2020 after a recount by a CARICOM team and multiple legal challenges by supporters of the previous Granger government. After his inauguration, President Ali appointed retired military leader Mark Phillips as prime minister and former President Bharrat Jagdeo (1999-2011) as vice president. Some observers contend that Jagdeo, who was constitutionally prohibited from seeking a third term,

plays a key role in policy decisions. Guyana's next national elections are scheduled to be held toward the end of 2025.

Political affiliations in Guyana are traditionally not based on ideological divisions but rather often fall along ethnic lines. The ruling PPP/C, which traditionally has been supported by Indo-Guyanese, governed Guyana from 1992 to 2015. The largest party in the opposition APNU coalition is the People's National Congress Reform (PNCR), which dominated the political system from independence until 1992 and draws support from an Afro-Guyanese base. The other main opposition party, AFC, identifies as a multiracial party. In the aftermath of the 2020 election crisis, some experts expressed concern about an increase in ethnic tension and called for the adoption of a more ethnically inclusive approach toward governing. Tensions are likely to remain ahead of the 2025 elections, according to Guyana's Ethnic Relations Commission.

Oil Changes Guyana's Economic Outlook

Guyana's economy traditionally was based on agriculture (rice and sugar) and mining (gold and bauxite), but the discovery of significant amounts of offshore oil bolstered the country's development prospects. The U.S. Geological Survey estimates that Guyana has reserves of 13.6 billion barrels of oil and 32 trillion cubic feet of gas. ExxonMobil leads a consortium that includes Hess and China National Offshore Oil Corporation and has been involved in oil and gas exploration in Guyana since 2008. Since 2015, the consortium has identified numerous commercially viable discoveries in the Stabroek Block, about 120 miles offshore. According to ExxonMobil, after five years of production, which began in 2019, "production capacity in Guyana is expected to surpass 1.7 million barrels per day, with gross production growing to 1.3 million barrels per day, by 2030."

Guyana's oil production enabled the country to withstand much of the economic fallout from COVID-19. In 2020, despite a global recession, Guyana's economy grew almost 44%, according to the IMF. From 2021 to 2024, economic growth in Guyana averaged 39.8%; the IMF predicts 14% growth in Guyana for 2025.

In 2019, Guyana's National Assembly approved legislation establishing the Natural Resource Fund (NRF), a sovereign wealth fund for managing the country's oil wealth. In December 2021, the government approved legislation amending the NRF's regulatory framework, asserting the action would ensure more transparency and accountability. Guyana's 2022 budget was the first to benefit from NRF financing; according to the government, NRF financing supported infrastructure investments, including in energy and transportation, and social expenditures in health and

education. For Guyana's 2025 budget, almost \$2.5 billion is expected to be withdrawn from the NRF to support national development priorities.

Guyana-Venezuela Essequibo Region Dispute

Guyana's oil discoveries have resurfaced a centuries-long border dispute over the oil-rich Essequibo region—a 62,000 square mile border territory west of the Essequibo River. In 1814, the United Kingdom (UK) acquired then-British Guiana, by treaty, from the Netherlands. The border dispute began in 1841, when Venezuela began to contest British claims to the Essequibo region. Venezuela repeatedly asked for U.S. assistance to settle the dispute; in 1895, invoking the Monroe Doctrine, then-U.S. Secretary of State Richard Olney sent a note to the British government to “submit the boundary dispute to arbitration.” Although the British claimed the Monroe Doctrine was invalid, President Grover Cleveland requested that Congress appoint a boundary commission. In 1899, the commission granted control of the Essequibo region to the UK.

Over the years, the border dispute has led to tensions between Venezuela and Guyana. In 1966, Guyana gained independence from the UK and thereby inherited the disputed Essequibo region. The 1966 Geneva Agreement outlined a four-year time period for newly independent Guyana and Venezuela to negotiate a solution. If they could not reach a solution, as was the case, the United Nations (UN) would intervene. After no resolution under UN auspices from 1990 to 2017 and renewed territorial claims from Venezuela, Guyana brought the case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 2018.

Venezuela's National Electoral Council claimed that more than 10.5 million Venezuelans approved reclaiming the disputed territory in a December 2023 referendum. Since then, tensions have been high between Venezuela and Guyana amid rhetoric from Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and reported Venezuelan military movement near the border region. The ICJ's judgment is expected in 2026.

U.S. and Congressional Interests

U.S. relations with Guyana improved in the early 1990s when the government moved away from one-party domination of the political system and embraced a market economy and free and fair elections. According to the U.S. State Department, U.S. policy toward Guyana has sought to support robust and sustainable democratic institutions, an empowered civil society, economic growth and development, and stability and security. Secretary of State Marco Rubio visited Guyana in March 2025. During his visit, the United States and Guyana signed an agreement to address shared security challenges, including narcotics trafficking and transnational crime. Regarding the border dispute, Secretary Rubio stated, “it will be a very bad day for the Venezuelan regime” if it were to attack Guyana or ExxonMobil, which has operations in the Essequibo region. Congress has supported regional trade and security initiatives in which Guyana participates.

U.S.-Guyana Trade

As Guyana has become an oil-producing country, trade with the United States has increased. The United States ran a trade deficit of roughly \$4.06 billion with Guyana in 2024, with U.S. exports valued at \$1.31 billion and U.S. imports valued at \$5.37 billion. Guyana is a member of two Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) trade preference programs. Since 1988, Guyana has been a beneficiary of the Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Act (P.L. 98-67, as amended, with no expiration), a preferential trade program for Caribbean imports. Since 2000, it has been a beneficiary of the Caribbean Basin Trade Partnership Act (Title II of P.L. 106-200, extended through September 2030), which provides enhanced tariff preferences for certain imports, including goods made with U.S. yarns, fabrics, and threads.

On April 2, 2025, President Trump issued an executive order asserting that “a lack of reciprocity” in bilateral trade relationships, disparate tariff rates and nontariff barriers, and U.S. trading partners' economic policies constitute “an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and economy of the United States.” The executive order declared a national emergency under the National Emergencies Act (50 U.S.C. §§1601 et seq.) and invoked the International Emergency Economic Powers Act of 1977 (50 U.S.C. §§1701 et seq.) to impose a minimum 10% tariff on all U.S. imports, with exceptions for certain goods, as of April 5, 2025; 38% tariffs were imposed on Guyana.

U.S. Foreign Aid

The United States provided \$3.3 million in assistance to Guyana in FY2023, latest full-year information available, from all U.S. agencies. Top aid categories included support for health, security, education, civil society, and environmental programs. In FY2023, the United States obligated \$200,000 for International Military Education and Training (IMET). The Biden Administration requested \$250,000 for IMET for FY2024 and FY2025.

Among U.S. aid programs, Guyana has received assistance since 2004 to combat HIV/AIDS through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief program. Since 2009, Guyana also received aid provided through the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI), a U.S. regional aid program to combat the drug trade and improve citizen security. CBSI support has provided patrol boats, training, and equipment for police and customs units.

Secretary Rubio announced the cancellation of thousands of foreign assistance contracts. The full scope of the cancellations remains unclear, though they reportedly included some U.S. Agency for International Development-managed health, education, security, and environmental programs, among others, in the Caribbean.

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